

A CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGY OF CHANGE

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AN ABSTRACT
of
A CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGY OF CHANGE

This dissertation is an effort to understand Jesus of Nazareth's radical call to repentance in terms which are true both to his first-century intent and to our twentieth-century scientific and homiletic experience. Jesus' call to repentance involves a demand for voluntary personal change, whereas many modern scientific and philosophical theories do not allow for such change.

An analysis of Jesus' message in chapter one reveals that he did call for and expect a radical change in his hearers, a change which encompassed both their relationship to God and the world. On the basis of the critical study of the Synoptic Gospels by Norman Perrin, a basic "core" of dominical sayings is distilled. Analysis of these sayings gives us a picture of Jesus' concept of change.

To arrive at a philosophically intelligible explanation of how the sort of change Jesus demanded is possible, attention is turned to the thought of Alfred North Whitehead. Chapter two is a presentation of Whitehead's views, showing that they provide a philosophically rigorous account of the possibility of radical, voluntary change.

Chapter three brings the Whiteheadian understanding of change together with Jesus' radical call to change. The result is a Christian cosmology of change that remains true to the intent of Jesus and to the rigor of Whitehead.

The final chapter applies philosophical/theological theory to real life--more specifically to preaching. Based on the Christian

cosmology of change developed in chapter three, suggestions are offered to assist the preacher in speaking more decisively about Jesus' call to repent and the ways this call can be interpreted in twentieth-century experience and thought. To further illustrate the usefulness of the Whiteheadian/dominical scheme in preaching, a sermon is presented and critically analyzed in terms of its adherence to Jesus' message and its truth to contemporary experience.

Mainline Protestant preaching rarely calls for radical personal change. One reason may be that our dominant modes of thought make us doubt that real changes are possible. Yet Christianity arose as a demand for change, and failure to sound this note appears unfaithful to our heritage. The dissertation argues that the possibility of voluntary change is intelligible and real and that preachers should call for it more boldly.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation, quite simply, is to arrive at a useful understanding of the radical call to repentance which is found in Jesus' life and message. While studying for the ministry, I often read certain passages in the gospels with a degree of trepidation. For example, I wondered how a twentieth and twenty-first century preacher could ever make practical sense of Luke 9:60a "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" or the numerous calls to repent for the kingdom of God is at hand (Mk. 1:14-15) when in Mt. 11:12 the kingdom of God has already come and in still other passages it is spoken of in futuristic terms.

One way to cope with the difficulties is to soften the radicality of Jesus' message by explaining away those especially problematic passages as later editions or incorrect quotations of sayings which are "out of context". If these techniques are used, Jesus becomes much more domesticated, more as we are, and simply challenges us to be better people as one who lived a life that showed us how. Unfortunately, or rather fortunately, this watered-down Jesus is hard to imagine as the motivating force behind the whole Christian tradition or even as enough of a challenge to be crucified by his own people.

Another way to cope with the difficulties in Jesus' message is to face them squarely in all their diverse radicality by trying, through the means of critical scholarship, to arrive at the message of Jesus and then see how it "fits" with our world today. This is, of course, by far the better approach to the problem.

The treatment of Jesus in this dissertation is based on the work of Norman Perrin and seeks to distill from the synoptic material the central thrusts of Jesus' message. In the process of this distillation, a dominical message emerges which has as its central theme Jesus' radical call to repentance. My effort will be to try to preserve the uniqueness of Jesus' life and call, for I believe that it is this uniqueness which best represents the true essence of Christian experience and best accounts for the tremendous impact Jesus had on his world and can have on ours today.

As we shall see later, the problems involved in facing up to Jesus' radical call to change present a fundamental dilemma for both the scientific and spiritual community. Both these sides of human experience have had difficulty explaining change without either sacrificing our individual freedom or positing a capricious, meddling God.

This shortfall of understanding reaches especially serious proportions in the proclamation of the message of Jesus. Ministers and lay people alike have increasingly called for only those kinds of changes which science and technology have allowed and have more and more ignored the viability of Jesus' calls to radical change. In the face of the onslaught of scientific logic and control the Christian vision of reality has lost much of its belief in the possibility of radical personal change. It is my contention that these concessions must not be allowed to continue, for radical personal change lies at the heart of the Christian message. Without it there is no realistic hope for a better future.

Second, I will present a brief resume of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead in terms of his understanding of how change occurs. This section will be essentially philosophical and will seek to lay a conceptual framework upon which to build a Christian cosmology of change.

The Whiteheadian scheme was chosen for a number of reasons. Process thought, while far from the last word on the subject, moves farther than any other I have explored toward synthesizing the scientific and emotional aspects of reality. It is a philosophy based on experience, which seeks to include all that we experience (from hard stubborn facts to feelings and even to psychic experiences) in a system which aims both for logical consistency and relevance to our own lives, not necessarily the same thing. It is a complex philosophy, with many new terms and ideas, but it is an extremely exciting and adequate philosophy as well. Once "inside" its framework of meaning it offers the student imaginative insights into the nature of perceived reality, the nature of God and the relationship of the two.

The rich potential of Whitehead's thought will be the conceptual fabric upon which the radicality of Jesus' message will be woven. This process fabric will not blur or blunt the challenges of Jesus but will seek to preserve his radical demands in concepts which are consistent both with Jesus' uniqueness and with modern perceptions of reality.

The third chapter, somewhat presumptuously entitled "A Christian Cosmology of Change" will present this synthesis in terms of

Jesus' radical call for repentance with a conscious effort to be true to the conclusions drawn in chapter one and true also to the philosophic rigor of Whitehead.

Finally, the important and often sadly neglected task of relating the knowledge gained through the Whiteheadian/dominical interaction to the church and pulpit will be undertaken. This final chapter, "A Homiletic Application", will critically analyze a sermon in the light of the insights arrived at in the first three chapters. The analysis will include suggestions for improving and strengthening the preaching endeavor when the problem of change is being confronted.

This dissertation will attempt to give credence to a vision of reality in which it is possible to affirm Jesus' unique call and at the same time not ignore the scientific facts of this present age.

CHAPTER I

AN ANALYSIS OF JESUS' MESSAGE

Before an inquiry can be made into the nature of the changes that Jesus proclaimed and demanded, it is first necessary to arrive at the most accurate statement presently possible of his goals and beliefs. The purpose of this chapter is to arrive at such a workable, cohesive understanding of the main thrust of Jesus' message and to delineate some specific arguments comprising this thrust.

Methodological problems abound in the achievement of this purpose. The first major problem is, of course, uncovering those sayings in the New Testament which most likely originated with Jesus.

Determining what Jesus said is no longer the easy problem it once seemed to be. The church fathers, and the church heretics alike, used anything in the New Testament as fodder for the lines of argument which developed concerning Jesus' nature and self-understanding. Since then, the allowable spectrum of admissible evidence has steadily narrowed to just the four gospels, then to the three synoptics and finally to even more rigorous exclusivity. The present state of the study of the authentic sayings of Jesus is just that: a study of certain, rigorously tested "sayings" found in the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke and occasionally in Thomas.

Subjecting the New Testament material to stiff criteria has greatly reduced the number of "sayings" which can be reasonably attributed to Jesus. The excisions of great amounts of synoptic

material by critical scholars have considerably changed the picture of the historical Jesus, for now there are left only "logia" and certain parables set like jewels in the later, secondary sources. When the gospel writers' interpretations are cut away we are left with only the barest chronology of Jesus' life and death. The original contexts and interpretations of these "sayings" are missing, probably never to be recovered. The critical analysis of the synoptic material has also shown us that many of the confusing titles and explanations previously attributed to Jesus are later editions and consequently the picture we now have of Jesus' message is more self-consistent and cohesive.

The achievement of an integrated, cohesive understanding of the teaching of Jesus will depend in large part on the work of Norman Perrin. In his book Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus, Perrin subjects major portions of the synoptic material to extremely stiff and rigorous inspection and extracts from this material a small, basic core of "authentic" sayings of Jesus. His method is more stringent than most and although he sometimes excises generally accepted authentic sayings, the central core of sayings which he distills from the material is almost universally accepted as authentic.

This chapter will use Perrin's work as its basic critical approach and will use his book as the basic critical text. Other major figures will be drawn in to supplement Perrin and although crucial differences in opinion and theory are prevalent in the field of synoptic research these differences will not be dealt with in this paper. The purpose of this paper, as stated before, is to synthesize

as best we can the "authentic" sayings of Jesus with an interpretation of those sayings. A discussion of the present state of study and opinion on this subject is important but not the task of this paper. The interpretation of Jesus' message will be drawn from those sayings which Perrin concludes are authentic. Certain key sayings are analyzed by Perrin and are used in this section and although this list of authentic sayings is not exhaustive, it is representative.

Before beginning the analysis of the message of Jesus, it is necessary to sketch Perrin's methodology. Citing for support such important scholars as Jeremias, Bultmann and Käsemann, Perrin begins with the altogether reasonable statement that "every single parable in the tradition has to be approached with the basic assumption that, as it now stands, it represents the teaching of the early Church."¹ The voice the gospel writers portray is "the voice of the risen Lord to the evangelist, and of the evangelist to the Church, not that of the historical Jesus to a group gathered by the sea of Galilee."² The fact that the early Church looked upon Jesus as the risen Lord is not an impropriety. It is, of course, necessary to connect these two aspects of Jesus' life. The Church did, does and should acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Lord are the same entity. Such acknowledgement, however, does confuse the discernment of Jesus' original sayings from post-Resurrection additions. The sayings are

¹Norman Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 21.

²Ibid., p. 22.

set in the context of Jesus' ministry antecedent to the resurrection. In order to arrive at the basic core of a saying which actually preceded the resurrection the scholar must attempt to remove the layers of tradition that surround it. The beginning step in this onion-peeling is in Perrin's words to "write a history of the tradition of which a given saying is a part, establishing so far as we are able to do so the earliest form of the saying known in the tradition. The synoptic traditions as we have them are the culmination of a long and complex process of transmission according to the needs, interests and emphases of the Church. It follows, therefore, that only the earliest form of any saying known to us, and a form not reflecting these needs, interests or emphases, has a claim to authenticity."³

Once the earliest form of a saying has been established, it must then be decided whether it should now be attributed to the early Church, to rabbinic Judaism, to the historical Jesus or to another source. Perrin concludes that "the earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church."⁴ This is the "criterion of dissimilarity". It seeks to distill from the synoptic gospels those sayings of Jesus which are uncharacteristic both of the Judaistic context of the time and of the later post-Easter interpretations. By definition, the criterion of dissimilarity excludes all teachings of Jesus which may have been similar to Judaistic or early Christian beliefs.

³Ibid., p. 32.

⁴Ibid., p. 39.

But the brutal fact of the matter is that we have no choice. There simply is no other starting point that takes seriously enough the radical view of the nature of the sources which the results of contemporary research are forcing upon us.⁵

Not every saying attributed to Jesus in the synoptic gospels is so presented that a history of the tradition can be written about it with enough accuracy that the criterion of dissimilarity can be invoked. Perrin proposes a second criterion for authenticity, a "criterion of coherence" which allows us to accept as authentic material of the earliest strata of the tradition "if it can be shown to cohere with material established as authentic by means of the criterion of dissimilarity."⁶

Perrin introduces a third criterion to his analysis, the "criterion of multiple attestation". "This is a proposal to accept as authentic material which is attested in all, or most, of the sources which can be discerned behind the synoptic gospels."⁷ Perrin uses this criterion not to establish specific authentic sayings but rather to delineate general motifs and characteristics of the ministry and teaching of Jesus. This third criterion argues for authenticity on the basis of general features in the synoptics. It is not frequently used by Perrin for it tends to cut against his method, which is to "arrive at elements in the tradition which have a high claim to authenticity and then to move out from there, going from the specific to the general."⁸

⁵Ibid., p. 43.

⁶Ibid.,

⁷Ibid., p. 45.

⁸Ibid., p. 47.

To recapitulate: Perrin's method of analysis is highly critical, arriving at only a small core of sayings and parables which can survive his historical analysis and the criterion of dissimilarity. These sayings, which must by the methodological presuppositions employed be distinct from Judaistic and Christian interpretations, form the basis for an understanding of the unique message of Jesus. Once the basic core sayings have been established, it is then possible, with the careful use of the other criterion of coherence and occasionally the criterion of multiple attestation, to begin to reconstruct the major aspects of the teachings of Jesus.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Among New Testament scholars there is almost universal agreement that Jesus preached and spoke about the kingdom of God. The central concerns in his life revolved around his concept of the kingdom of God and it is to this concept that we now turn.

The idea of the kingdom of God wasn't unique with Jesus. John Bright and others show us that he stood at the end of a long Jewish tradition which saw the kingdom of God coming in the future. Conzelmann correctly argues that a "substratum of Jewish eschatology is evident in the fact that the concept of the kingdom of God is not explained but presumed to be understood."⁹ In order to understand what Jesus meant when he referred to the kingdom of God it is

⁹Hans Conzelmann, Jesus (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 68.

important first to understand some of the characteristics of the prior Jewish tradition from which he both drew and departed.

In Israel the expectation of the kingdom of God arose out of the transformation of national hopes. At the base of the Israelite political system was the confidence that Yahweh was in charge, and consequently, since it was inconceivable that Yahweh could be defeated, the Israelites looked forward to the day when Yahweh would reign in power.¹⁰ Bornkamm supplements this point by emphasizing the supreme confidence the Jews had (and have) in the eventual reign of Yahweh. Their faith was in Yahweh's power and their hope was directed toward the coming kingdom. "The revelation of the kingdom of God is the very essence of the hope, which will find its fulfillment only at the end of time. It is still hidden, still held back, the powers of evil... sin, tribulation and death--are still in control, but the hope of the appearing of God's kingdom holds firmly and unerringly to a belief in his victory and to the certainty of his promise."¹¹

This faith is evident throughout the Old Testament, evident enough that Bright can write that the Old Testament is "in all its parts, suffused with the awareness of the rule of God over his people."¹² The Psalms praise the kingdom, the apocalyptic books see

¹⁰ Maurice Goguel, The Life of Jesus (New York: Macmillan, 1945), p. 562.

¹¹ Günther Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 65.

¹² John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 191.

its imminence, and the prophets inform us that this "future act of God will be decisive for the salvation of the people in a way in which his past acts on their behalf were not."¹³

In its early forms, Jewish eschatology was expressed in many divergent ways--through rituals, prophesy and psalms.¹⁴ By the time of Jesus however, these forms had begun to crystallize into definite patterns and motifs. The eschatological event of the kingdom of God became the "last, decisive all-transforming act of God on behalf of his people."¹⁵ Goguel argues that the hope in God's intervention became more and more transcendental and finally led to the idea of a new world which would be substituted for the old.¹⁶ This may have been an extreme development, not typical of most of Judaism, but there is no doubt that a number of specific hopes were contained in the nexus which was Jewish eschatology. There was the perennial hope of political restoration, of independence from Rome through military action. There was at the same time the traditional hope that the exaltation would occur soon after the Law was properly and perfectly kept. Finally, there was the apocalyptic hope of the catastrophic intervention of God in history and the consequent establishment of his kingdom.¹⁷

As can be seen, there was no consensus about the specifics of the coming kingdom. There was only the absolute certainty that it

¹³Perrin, p. 56.

¹⁴cf. Bornkamm, p. 65 and Perrin, p. 56.

¹⁵Perrin, p. 56.

¹⁶Goguel, p. 562.

¹⁷Bright, p. 191.

would come. All the particular forms in which we find this certainty expressed are simply varied attempts to press into service myths and symbols which point to a common belief.¹⁸ When the kingdom of God was spoken of, each hearer would see its definiteness in terms of the myths and symbols he or she employed. The kingdom of God was thus an inexpressible certainty which was symbolically pointed to by individuals in the Jewish community.

Jesus' message lives by this same certainty. "When we say, then, that Jesus proclaimed the eschatological kingdom of God, we mean that he proclaimed the final and decisive activity of God in visiting and redeeming his people; no particular form of this activity is necessarily implied and no particular accompanying phenomena must necessarily be present."¹⁹

The background structure of Jesus' message is grounded firmly in the Jewish tradition. It is his starting-point. The departures he made from this starting-point, however, were radical and unique and it is to these characteristics in Jesus' concept of the kingdom of God that we now turn.

The term "kingdom of God", as we have seen, is not new with Jesus. However, Jesus used and interpreted this term in unusual ways. His message of the kingdom "coming" is practically unique in ancient literature and liturgy. Early Jewish liturgies spoke of the kingdom being "established" but the verb "to come" was reserved for talk about

¹⁸Perrin, pp. 56-57

¹⁹Ibid., p. 57.

the New Age.²⁰ The teaching of Jesus not only "regularly uses the verb 'to come' in connection with the kingdom and avoids the other verbs more characteristic of ancient Judaism, but also never speaks of God 'appearing' as king."²¹ Likewise, outside the synoptics the verb "to come" is never used with "kingdom", for what the early Church expected to come is not the kingdom but Jesus as Lord. Thus, passages which use the verb "to come" when speaking of the kingdom of God have more claim to authenticity than do passages which speak of the kingdom in more Jewish or "Christian" terms.

An examination of the New Testament "kingdom of God" passages leads Perrin to conclude that in the synoptic gospels is found a unique use of the term. In a very general statement it can be said that according to the evidence of the synoptic tradition Jesus used the phrase "kingdom of God", 1) in reference to God's decisive intervention in human historical experience and 2) in reference to that state secured for the redeemed by this intervention.²²

This chapter relies heavily on Perrin's work, adopts many of his assumptions and looks for a basic core of dominical sayings upon which to reconstruct the major tenets of Jesus' message. Since much of Perrin's methodology has been explained earlier we shall turn directly to a few, crucial passages without wading through the analytical/critical processes with Perrin.

²⁰Ibid., p. 58.

²¹Ibid., p. 59.

²²Ibid., p. 60.

Matthew 12:28

But if it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

This saying has high claims to authenticity for a number of reasons. It is full of the "feeling of eschatological power" which must have permeated Jesus' ministry.²³ It also meets two of Perrin's requirements by referring to the action of God and using the verb "to come". The problem with this passage is not the question of its authenticity but rather the question of its interpretation.

First of all, this saying implies that Jesus practiced exorcism in his ministry. This reference to exorcism is by no means unique to this passage for references can "be found in every stratum of the synoptic tradition and the ancient Jewish texts regard Jesus as a miracle worker, i.e., an exorcist."²⁴ We must be realistic and accept the fact that exorcism was a part of Jesus' ministry, and once accepted we can move into the intent of this saying, which is to interpret the exorcism performed by Jesus.

It is clear that Jesus saw this exorcism as the work of God, not the work of demons. Furthermore, he contended that those who experienced the exorcism experienced the kingdom of God. The implication, then, is clearly that in the ministry of Jesus there are certain events which are nothing less than an experience of the kingdom of God.²⁵ The fact of the exorcism is evidence of the fact of the

²³ Rudolf Bultmann, A History of the Synoptic Tradition (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 162.

²⁴ Perrin, p. 65.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

kingdom of God. There is no futuristic eschatology implied. The experience is now and, most importantly, it is personal. Jesus speaks of the kingdom coming upon an individual by way of making him or her whole and unconfused. This intensely personal concern is another hallmark of Jesus' message. It is a break with the Jewish idea of the restoration of the state of Israel. "The experience of the individual, rather than that of the people as a whole, has become the focal point of the eschatological activity of God."²⁶

A final addition to this interpretation should be made by explaining the context of conflict which is implied in the saying. Perrin correctly points out that when "an exorcism is a manifestation of the kingdom of God, then that kingdom is manifested in terms of a conflict between good and evil."²⁷ This saying, then, implies and depicts a number of key elements in Jesus' message. In it we see a personal, present kingdom affecting the individual, not in heavenly, pure surroundings of bliss and happiness, but in the conflict of the present age.

Luke 17:20b-21

The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!" for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. (among you)

This saying is based on an Aramaic saying which is very early and is used by Luke. The clumsy Greek "entos" (here translated "in the midst of" or "among") and the evidence of an Aramaic base in

²⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

²⁷ Ibid.

similar Thomas passages (notably Thomas 113) points to an Aramaic origin. In addition to the origin, the passage exhibits characteristics which belong to the teaching of Jesus. It speaks of the kingdom as an intervention in human experience and refers to it as "coming".²⁸

Again the interpretation of this saying is difficult. Perrin argues in The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus that the "not coming with signs to be observed" denies the possibility of apocalyptic speculation which sees history running a predetermined course with numerous signs along the way.²⁹ Instead, Jesus is saying that the kingdom is not of such a nature that a sign will mark its presence. The kingdom of God is not something one can point to and say "It is here!" or "there!", but rather, it is something "entos hymon"-- "among you".³⁰

Once again, the meaning of the saying is that the kingdom is a matter of personal human experience. It is not following a preconceived course but rather is free and depends for its recognition on our freedom and faith to see it among us. It is found wherever the activity of God is recognized for what it is--the kingdom of God among us.

Matthew 11:12

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 68-74.

²⁹Norman Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 176ff.

³⁰Perrin, Rediscovering..., p. 73.

This saying is part of the tradition about John the Baptist. The backbone of this tradition is that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and began his ministry after John's met a violent end. These are certainly historical facts because 1) they imply an element of dependence of Jesus upon the Baptist, 2) they are inconceivable as products of a Christian community concerned to exalt its Lord and engaged in revalry with Baptist sects and 3) Perrin concludes from this analysis that "sayings which reflect a high estimate of the Baptist both stand at the earliest stratum of the tradition about him and reflect the attitude of Jesus rather than that of the early Church."³¹

The interpretation of this saying has three major emphases. The first is Jesus' desire to include John the Baptist in the new aeon of God's kingdom. Bornkamm, Perrin and others agree that Jesus is looking back to John and is drawing him to his own side "as the initiator of the new aeon."³² Second, there is once again the definite emphasis in the saying that the kingdom of God is at hand. The immediate presence of the kingdom is, in fact, not the initial in-breaking, for it began in the past, in the days of John the Baptist. The kingdom is present enough to have a past and, as we have seen in Luke 17:20 and Matthew 12:28, Jesus challenges us to think of it in new, radically present terms.

Finally, this saying, like Matthew 12:28, refers to a situation of conflict. Unlike Matthew 12:28, however, this passage strongly implies that the kingdom of God has faced and does face defeats.

³¹ Ibid., p. 75.

³² Bornkamm, p. 51.

The tone of the saying leads us to think of a violent, confusing aeon in which the kingdom of God is actively involved and occasionally being defeated. An understanding which sees the kingdom of God meeting with defeats as well as victories is again evidence of Jesus' belief in the presence of the kingdom, for the present age of which Jesus was a part was a far cry from the completion of the kingdom of God and Jesus realistically admits this fact. The power of his vision lay in the unique way in which he related the kingdom to his time. On the one hand it was present, working to overcome the violence of the day and, on the other, it was in the future, for its present incompleteness would not be a part of the established kingdom which was yet to come.

All three of the sayings so far presented emphasize the immediacy of the kingdom of God. It is available and working now. Matthew 12:28 and 11:12 present a realistic appraisal of the present situation--one of conflict and failure as well as one of victory and peace. Luke 17:20 cuts in the same direction by affirming that the kingdom will not come apocalyptically but rather is among us at this time, working visibly to those who recognize it. Finally, the sayings emphasize the personal experience of the kingdom. Matthew 12:28 and Luke 17:20 make this point quite clearly. Matthew 11:12 argues less obviously by pointing out that individual persons are doing violence to it.

Jesus understood the kingdom of God to be present and manifest in his ministry; "all else in his teaching takes its point of

departure from this central, awe-inspiring conviction."³³ We have not yet mentioned Jesus' love for simile, parable and analogy which is another characteristic of his ministry. The three passages already discussed have been subjected to many differing interpretations primarily because of the confusing overlay of synoptic material. The metaphors Jesus employed in his teaching, while overlaid and interpreted by the early Church and the evangelists, are not as difficult to "rediscover". The early Church had the tradition of similes and analogies of Jesus but "lacking the vision to maintain or understand them, she transformed them into allegories expressive of a post-Easter faith and reflecting a post-Easter situation."³⁴ Our discussion of similes relevant to the kingdom of God will be brief and seek to present a very few representative passages. An exhaustive study is not within the scope of this paper and would not affect the conclusions of this section.

The vast majority of dominical parables and similes are concerned with "the experience and/or subsequent activity of men confronted" by the reality of the kingdom.³⁵ Only a few sayings can be said to be concerned with the proclamation of the kingdom of God. It is to a cross-section of these sayings that we now turn.

Matthew 13:44

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up, then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

³³Perrin, Rediscovering..., pp. 77-78.

³⁴Ibid., p. 78.

³⁵Ibid., p. 83.

Matthew places this parable next to the parable of the pearl and, indeed, they are very similar. The parable of the treasure reflects an awareness of Palestinian life and a sympathy for its circumstances that is a hallmark of Jesus' parabolic style. It tells us of a man who, quite by accident, discovers a treasure in a field, sells all that he has and buys that field. Perrin points out that this situation is an entirely plausible one to the first century mind, for "in a land as frequently fought over as ancient Palestine the chance discovery of valuables hidden for safe keeping in some past emergency was by no means unusual."³⁶ The joy which would follow such a discovery is entirely understandable to Jesus' listeners. The point is clear: as joy seized the man who discovered the treasure and sold all that he had in order to possess it, so it is with the kingdom of God. The joy of its realization in our experience is enough to make us want to give up all that we have in order to participate in it. Once experienced, it determines our future activity.

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I

³⁶Ibid., p. 89.

will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants." And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to make merry.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

The point of this story is the forgiveness of sins. It is a parable, not an allegory--"The father is not God, the elder son is not a Pharisee, the whole story concerns a real family in a familiar situation."³⁷ The characters in it and their actions are understandable, although confusing, to the Palestinians who heard it. The power of this parable is in the action the father takes. To a Jew, one could hardly sink lower than to become a keeper of unclean animals, a swine-herd. Those Jews who plumbed such depths were to be treated as Gentiles; for to consciously become as a Gentile was to place an almost

³⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

insurmountable obstacle in one's path to salvation.³⁸ This is, of course, exactly what the younger son did. Those who heard the parable and those to whom it was specifically addressed would no doubt have agreed that the younger son became dead in his father's eyes and "any self-respecting Jewish father would have spurned him had he returned in such disgrace."³⁹

With this understanding in mind we can see how Jesus turned the tables on morality by describing the father's outrageously extravagant forgiveness. The elder son's protest is entirely within the framework of traditional Jewish concepts of justice. It was a proper and, Perrin argues, quite necessary response arising from a community in which certain limitations had to be placed on actions in order to insure communal tranquillity.⁴⁰ The whole point of the parable is summed up in the father's reply that this is an extraordinary situation where the ordinary socially proper rules do not apply; "for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

Jesus' teachings challenged Palestinian Judaism with a concept of God's kingdom which depicted his love being revealed to them in new and dramatic ways. He spoke of a God who offered salvation to anyone who earnestly sought it, a God who demanded that we sacrifice the principles and presuppositions we cling to with such certainty. The important thing was not a principle, or an attitude or a tradition--the important thing to keep always striving for was to enter the

³⁸Ibid., p. 94.

³⁹Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 97.

kingdom of God, a kingdom which radically forgave sins and broke stereotypes. The new wine was bursting the old wineskins.⁴¹

Luke 15:8-9

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying 'Rejoice with me for I have found the coin which I had lost.'

The emphasis in this parable is different from that in the one discussed under new wine/new wineskins motif obvious in the Prodigal Son. Here, the point is simply the joy and relief in finding what was lost. Like the parable of the Hidden Treasure, and to a considerable extent the parable of the Prodigal Son, the message is one of rejoicing at finding something of great value. However, the Lost Coin parable introduces a different flavor into Jesus' description of the kingdom. One can't avoid comparing the woman to God and the coin to a person. Luke goes on in verse 10 to do precisely this, and although Perrin argues that such a Lukan addition is not a correct interpretation, the point is moot. It isn't ridiculous to speak of the joy God must feel when a person begins to enter the kingdom. On the other hand, it isn't unreasonable to allow that this parable expresses the joy and happiness persons feel when they discover the kingdom of God. In either case, the kingdom is described as being analogous to the joy we feel when we recover something which is precious to us.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 97.

Jesus' concept of the kingdom of God was unique, exciting and, given the expressive force of his metaphorical language, powerful to those who heard him. He spoke of a kingdom in realistic terms which recognized the conflicts and tensions of his day. He spoke of a kingdom which was even in this present age breaking into people's lives. He spoke of a kingdom of joy and fellowship which can and does come to each of us. Finally, he spoke of a kingdom which was discoverable in personal experience if we would but recognize it. His was a radical, personal, present kingdom and it demanded a radical, personal, present response. It is to an analysis of this demand and response that we now turn.

THE RESPONSE TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

The nature of the kingdom and the demands which it entailed are closely tied together in Jesus' proclamation. The separation indicated by the heading "The Response to the Kingdom of God" is an artificial one. The line between description and demand is a fine one whenever radical ideas are being presented in exciting ways. Jesus' personal exuberance, creativity and witness further blur this line. However, although it is important to remember that the two emphases are intrinsically inseparable, it is also useful to be able to understand as best we can the details of these emphases. Consequently, we shall employ the category "The Response to the Kingdom of God" as the title for an analytical reconstruction of the way Jesus expected people to respond to his proclamation.

A key part of this response revolves around the concept of "repentance". Although Perrin considers those synoptic passages which contain the word _____ (repentance) to be later, interpretive additions, major New Testament (and Old Testament) scholars are in universal agreement about the authenticity of the concept in Jesus' message. The fact that there are no invincibly authentic dominical sayings which use the word "repentance" does not mean that Jesus never used the concept, or the word, for that matter. Furthermore, some aspects of Jesus' radical call demand that the concept of repentance be employed to understand them. Finally, it will be seen that the concept of repentance, when understood accurately, helps illumine many of the seeming "impossibilities" and strange demands in Jesus' message. (One final argument can be brought to bear in defense of using a word for which there is no "authenticated" evidence and that argument is that we have no other reasonable way of coming to grips with Jesus' demands that both enlightens our understanding and fits the milieu of the ancient Palestinian world.)

The concept of repentance is a basic part of Old Testament theology. It had its foundations in the Law and the prophets as Moore and others point out.⁴² Passages in the Mishnah clearly make repentance "the indispensable condition of the remission of every kind of sin, and this, with the other side of it, namely, that God freely and fully remits the sins of the penitent, is a cardinal doctrine of

⁴²George Foote Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1954), I, 507.

Judaism."⁴³ The prophets preached that the actions of Israel would precipitate Yahweh's wrath. There was but one way of forgiveness and restoration and that was to turn from evil ways toward God.⁴⁴ The Law expresses the doctrine of repentance in Deuteronomy, the national history from the exodus to the fall of Jerusalem, and especially in Judges and Kings, "with the express purpose of exemplifying this as the first law of history."⁴⁵

We see in the Old Testament the development of the doctrine from one demanding national repentance to the more personalized, individual concern exemplified in Ezekiel 18:21f.

"But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live."

Culminating in Ezekiel, but beginning much earlier, the whole great prophetic doctrine of collective repentance and reformation was translated into personal religion; it became the condition of salvation for the individual as it had been originally for the nation.⁴⁶ It should be pointed out that this "new doctrine" of repentance and the remission of sins did not radically affect Judaism's basic indifference to the life-after-death question. "For that, the Jews would not only have had to ignore the greater part of their Scriptures, but to be infected with the prevalent pessimistic dualism, which in one form or another, was the fundamental philosophy of the other-worldly

⁴³ Ibid., I, 500.

⁴⁴ Ibid., I, 501.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., I, 502.

religions of the age."⁴⁷

By the time of Jesus, then, the doctrine of repentance was a basic tenet of Jewish faith. Although the doctrine was generally understood in terms of national response, the prophets and other early leaders had also called for individual acts of repentance and had emphasized the salvific value of such personal actions.

Moore points out that in spite of the importance of the idea of repentance in the Old Testament, the language has no specific name for it. "The fundamental concept in the prophets is turning back to the allegiance and obedience of God."⁴⁸ The Hebrew word used in this context means literally "turn about". By this association, the primary sense of repentance in Judaism is always a change in one's attitude toward God and a change in the conduct of life. "The substance of repentance is the abandonment of evil deeds and evil intentions, a radical change of conduct and motive."⁴⁹

Jeremiah 31:33-34 gives us still another insight into the nature of repentance. In the passage the Lord is saying to Jeremiah, But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

This passage speaks of the initiative of the Lord in affecting the act

⁴⁷ Ibid., I, 502.

⁴⁸ Ibid., I, 507.

⁴⁹ Ibid., I, 509.

of repentance. While repentance was a personal action, it was accomplished only with God's assistance, hence, the power of God could be seen even in the act of repentance.

There is also another word in Hebrew commonly translated "repent" which properly means "be sorry". "Such regret frequently involves a change of mind regarding the future as well as the past, and this, rather than the feeling which prompts it is often the principal import of the word."⁵⁰ Thus in Numbers 23:19 it is said that God will not repent (or have a change of mind).

In I Samuel 15:29 it is written that if men change their conduct and turn from their evil ways, God will change his mind. The notion of a change of purpose is a part of this meaning of repentance.

By Judeo-Christian times, then, the concept of repentance had a rather clear and generally understood meaning. It described the condition of turning back or turning around in one's relation to God and understood God to be active in the accomplishment of the change. Within the concept was implied a change in motives which affected future actions and rendered a person's past irrelevant in the eyes of God.

A call to repentance, then, is a call to a radical reversal of present motives, activities and allegiances. Mark tells us that "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'", (Mk. 1:14-15) As mentioned before, this passage cannot

⁵⁰ Ibid., I, 510.

be traced with any reliability to an actual utterance by Jesus; however, the meaning is accurate--Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God and demanded a radical response to that proclamation. It is hoped that an analysis of some representative sayings of Jesus will establish the fact the the response expected was repentance in the Old Testament sense of the doctrine.

Mark 2:19

And Jesus said to them, 'Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?'

J. Jeremias prefers to translate the question "Can the wedding guests fast during the wedding?"⁵¹ In either translation, the saying has high claims to authenticity, for it represents an unusual attitude towards the practice of fasting. There is strong evidence to support the thesis that Jesus and his disciples did not fast during his ministry. (See below the discussion of Matthew 11:16-19). The early Church tried to defend the ancient pietistic practice of fasting (Mk. 2:20) but the message of Jesus in both parabolic and logia-forms cuts against such an ascetic tradition.⁵² We have already seen in the discussion of the parable of the Prodigal Son that joy and feasting were looked upon with approval by Jesus. The passage under consideration here reflects a mood of joyousness and festivity in which fasting would be out of place. The attitude expressed is dissimilar to the early

⁵¹ Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 52.

⁵² Perrin, Rediscovering..., pp. 79-80.

Christian tradition.

In addition to the dissimilarities with the Christian tradition, this passage also breaks with general Jewish practices by alluding to a "well-documented ancient Jewish practice of freeing wedding participants, including guests, from religious obligations during the seven days of the wedding celebration."⁵³ While not precisely meeting the letter of the criterion of dissimilarity, such an exception meets the spirit of the criterion by referring not to general but rather to extraordinary rules.

Finally, the passage refers to Jesus' unique table-fellowship, which was a key element in the common life he shared with his followers.⁵⁴ This passage gives us some healthy insights into the nature of our expected response to Jesus' message. It tells us that Jesus regarded the present as a time of rejoicing and release from conventional obligations. It implies that something as personally exciting as a wedding and all its concomitant festivities is taking place--the decisive beginning of a new relationship to God.

Matthew 11:16-19

But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, "We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the son of man came eating and drinking and they say, "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"

The authenticity of this passage is strongly supported by the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

high estimate of John the Baptist. Here Jesus puts his ministry and the Baptist's on the same level; a comparison the early Church would definitely have avoided, if at all possible. A second supportive argument is that this passage easily retranslates back into Aramaic; "hence it is early."⁵⁵ Further, the reference to Jesus as "a glutton and a drunkard" is definitely not a later addition, but rather "belongs to the polemics of the controversy surrounding Jesus' earthly ministry during his lifetime,"⁵⁶ Finally, there is reference to the table-fellowship which so distinguished Jesus by the use of the words "drunkard", "glutton" and "friend of tax collectors and sinners."⁵⁷

In this unusual passage both the parable and its application are authentic even though the arguments for dissimilarity and coherence lie in the application. The parable's case for authenticity rests on its Aramaic background, its expression of Palestinian experience and its perfect fit with the point of the application.

The parable reflects an intimate understanding of Palestinian life. According to Jeremias the reference here is to a few members of a group of children who are sitting, wishing to play only a passive part in the games the whole group is playing.⁵⁸ The laziness of the few has led to a quarrel and the lazy children blame the active ones for spoiling the fun. The parable, then, is at pains to describe a group who blame others for something which is really their own fault.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

⁵⁸ Jeremias, pp. 160-161.

⁵⁹ Perrin, p. 86.

The rare dominical application fits perfectly with the parable. The group who are like these children are those who find offence both in John and in Jesus. Like the children who pipe but wish others to dance, these people want everyone to be in accordance with their wishes. Further, they blame not themselves, but John and Jesus for their unhappiness.

An insight into the response Jesus expected from those who heard his message is given in the dominical application. Jesus uses the words "glutton", "drunkard" and "friend", all of which can imply a joyous, festive situation, or at least an unfriendly interpretation of such an occasion.⁶⁰ Jesus' reference to himself as the glutton and friend to sinners indicated first the joyousness of the celebration and second the radical nature of that celebration. In ancient Jewish times there were few people more despised or rejected than tax collectors and sinners (Jews who made themselves as Gentiles).⁶¹ Jesus depicts his relationship to them as friendly and the fellowship as joyous.

The reference to the "son of man" in Mt. 11:19 is interpreted by Perrin as a later edition. The words may have originally been "son of man" but the confessional status now given it is of later origin.⁶²

Luke 10:30-37

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half-dead. Now by chance a priest was going down

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 106.

⁶² Ibid., p. 120.

that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

The authenticity of this parable is undisputed. Its vividness, clarity and power reflect the touch of Jesus in its construction. Furthermore, it exhibits an intimate knowledge of Palestinian ways and customs.

The actual question "Who is my neighbor?" in verse 29 may or may not be authentic; the point of the parable, whatever specific situation prompted it in the first place, is to explain neighborliness.

It is an "exemplary story" as Perrin labels it and is concerned "to teach by example, in this instance the example of true neighborliness."⁶³ Of the three passers-by, only one recognized the need and was motivated to act in a different way than normal. The fact that the real neighbor was a Samaritan is as shocking as the fact that the Prodigal Son turned out to be a swine-herd. Jews and Samaritans had no love for each other, either racially or religiously, and the fact that a Samaritan emerged as the hero over both a priest and a Levite indicated again the radicality of Jesus' message. The point is that we must be prepared to abandon traditional presuppositions. The response demanded was one of forgiveness, generosity and love even for our most

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Ibid., p. 123.

despised enemies.⁶⁴

A further point can be established when this parable is compared with the parable of the Prodigal Son. Set in the context of Jesus' ministry and message, these two parables can be seen as the human imitation of God's response to our needs. We all fall short of what God hopes for us to be and the forgiveness of sins constituted a major aspect of Jesus' proclamation. The full impact of this forgiveness was driven home to the first century mind when it was taught that God's forgiveness extended to the Gentiles and even to the "Jew who had made himself as a Gentile."⁶⁵

Matthew 17:20b

For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move hence to yonder place" and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

There is a considerable tradition of faith sayings built up from this core. The authenticity of this verse, and others like it in other passages, is grounded in the facts the 1) there are no parallels in Judaism of a concept of faith in this form and 2) this saying is coherent with the emphasis on faith found in the exorcism-healing tradition.⁶⁶

There is no doubt that Jesus did help people in ways that his contemporaries regarded as remarkable. Jesus, however, insisted that it was one's faith which had saved them and in fact went so far in declar-

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 124.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

ing the power of faith as to teach that even the smallest amount of it (i.e., "as a grain of mustard seed") could work unbelievable wonders (i.e., move mountains).

"Faith" is one of the key elements in the response Jesus expected to his proclamation and he was at pains to describe the nature of this element. What Jesus meant when he asked those around him to have "faith" or when he declared that their "faith" had saved them is of critical importance in understanding the nature of his message.

Interestingly, there are no authentic (perhaps we should say "authenticated") sayings of Jesus which explicitly demand "faith" in God or in himself. Rather, "faith" is used in an absolute sense.⁶⁷ The person directed to have "faith" is not directed to any further confession or affiliation. "Faith" alone is demanded. This unusual concept of faith is an often ignored facet of Jesus' teachings and is strikingly different from traditional Jewish or early Christian faith-structures. The criterion of dissimilarity allows us to posit the thesis that the concept of "faith" here under discussion is authentic to Jesus.⁶⁸

Both in the instances of healing and the forgiveness of sins, Jesus demanded that the person affected need only have faith for the act to be accomplished. Perrin's analysis breaks this faith-act into two parts. First, one must recognize that God is indeed present and working in and through Jesus' ministry. This recognition is more than merely accepting the premise that God is present. Rather, "faith is

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 138.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

essentially an assent to a particular interpretation of an event, an interpretation not necessarily self-evident in the event itself."⁶⁹ Faith need not be confessional nor does it necessarily arise from the belief-structures of a particular religion. Rather, it is a part of an individual's interpretation of and relation to a specific event. Exorcism and healings were not new to the first century; interpreting them in the way that Jesus did, as a manifestation of the kingdom of God, was indeed new.

The first appropriate response of faith is recognition. The second part of this response is trust. It is one thing to interpret a particular event in Jesus' ministry as God's work; it is quite another thing to believe and trust that this interpretation is correct. Jesus' use of "faith" implies that the hearer must first recognize and then trust God's power and presence in a given situation. "Faith means to recognize the concrete situation for what it is and to respond in the only appropriate manner to its challenge."⁷⁰ One's faith lives moment by moment, event by event. The content of that faith is defined by the content of the reality encountered. In the cases of exorcism and healing, one's faith must be in God's power over human frailties. In the case of the Prodigal Son, it is defined by the recognition and belief in God's love and forgiveness.

Interpretations of a particular event may vary, but trust in a particular interpretation either exists or doesn't exist. Faith "as a grain of mustard seed" is one of Jesus' ways of making this point.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 140.

⁷⁰Ibid.

However limited our capacity to trust may be, our trust, if it is there, is real trust. Jesus demanded that we have faith in God's action in the concrete situations which make up our lives. He challenged us to faith as trustful response to his proclamation that God was, indeed, active as king in his ministry, and as such was active in specific events, occasions and incidents in our lives. The response was in terms of trust and issued in obedience.

The final passages to be discussed fall under the broad category of "response-as-obedience logia". These logia exhibit the radicality and challenge of Jesus' message. Following Perrin's work, the logia dealt with in this paper are taken from Bultmann's A History of the Synoptic Tradition. In dealing with this book Perrin writes: "this investigation is so thorough, the emerging history of the tradition so convincing and the application of what we have called the criterion of dissimilarity so careful, that we feel no need to do more than quote Bultmann's conclusion. All the sayings...contain something characteristic, new, reaching out beyond popular wisdom and piety and yet (they) are in no sense scribal or rabbinic, nor yet Jewish apocalyptic. So here, if anywhere, we can find what is characteristic of the preaching of Jesus."⁷¹ The authenticity of these sayings is indubitable and therefore will not be questioned here.

Matthew 5:39b-41

But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also, and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one

⁷¹Ibid., p. 142.

mile, go with him two miles,

This passage was selected because it is representative of the way Jesus talked about obedience. It reflects an intimate knowledge of Palestinian affairs and once interpreted into our concepts exhibits the radicality, which by this time, one is led to expect from Jesus.

A strike on the right cheek was tantamount to a formal insult. In this situation one's honor was at stake and the exhortation to respond by turning the other cheek commanded an action which transcended this normally proper response. The well-known reference in verse 41 to the Roman practice of impressing civilians into temporary service demanded an equally unusual response--willingness to walk an extra mile. Finally, the command to give up one's cloak as well as one's coat led to a very embarrassing if not impossible situation. The male garb of first century Palestine consisted of two articles of clothing; an inner and an outer garment. Jesus' demand to give up both if one is required of you leaves the generous disciple naked.

In all these cases, the demand is for the unusual, at times nearly impossible response. There can be no other reasonable conclusion than that Jesus knew what he was asking and that these rules-for-obedience are designed to illustrate a principle rather than lay down a law.⁷²

Jesus confronted his hearers with a radical demand, a demand that they respond "to the challenge of God in terms of a radically

⁷²Ibid., pp. 147-148.

new approach to the business of living."⁷³ The specifics of this new way are not given; rather, the sayings are illustrations of the necessity for the new way. The implication is that if one approaches life's incidents in a new spirit and seeks the way in terms of one's new relationship to God and the world, then that way can be found.⁷⁴

Other passages, the authenticity of which is undisputed, exhibit the same extreme demand for a unique kind of obedience. Matthew 5:44-48 is an exhortation to "love your enemies" and "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". Mark 10:25 expresses an equally impossible attitude toward riches for "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". The point is consistently emphasized that a different, unprecedented ethic-for-obedience is being taught.

Luke 9:60a is perhaps the most extreme of all of Jesus' sayings, and one of the most confusing. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" cuts directly against the accepted social and moral beliefs and practices of that day as well as ours.⁷⁵ In Judaism, the responsibility for burying the dead was one that took precedence over all other duties, and yet Jesus tells his listeners to let the dead bury their own--a ridiculous and logically-faulty command. The radicality of this verse is its strongest claim to authenticity and the only reasonable interpretation is that, once again, Jesus was arguing by example that those who respond to the kingdom of God must be able to

⁷³ Ibid., p. 148.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 144.

transcend even the most highly revered laws and customs of their day.

Mark 10:15

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

This beautiful, simple saying is an appropriate summary of the response Jesus demanded. We must bring to our recognition of God's activity the ready trust, the openness and the instinctual obedience of a child.⁷⁶

Reflecting back on the discussion of "repentance" as a radical turn-about, we can see the usefulness of the concept in understanding the nature of the response demanded by Jesus. He called for a personal turning from worldly allegiances to trust in and obedience to God. He spoke of the necessity of extreme changes in our attitudes, commitments and presuppositions.

It can be said that the keystone of Jesus' "ethical" teachings is the concept of repentance, whether or not the specific word "repent" is presently extant in the authentic source material. Tied to this reversal of allegiances was the remission of sins, for in the eyes of God, a person's present faith erased the burden of his or her past mistakes. Jesus called upon his followers to repent, to re-interpret their world with the kingdom of God in mind. The living out of this interpretative effort meant living in faith, trust and obedience both to Jesus' "vision of reality" and to God's power and presence in all events.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

Jesus' message is intensely personal and yet at the same time is of truly cosmic proportions. We are called to re-orient ourselves to an interpretation of reality which sees the kingdom of God working in every event in our lives. This extremely personal, almost selfish conviction is balanced by the faith that God is working in all events, recognized or not. What is required of us is to begin to recognize God's work and respond to it. Obedience to God is the result of placing our trust in God's present activities in each of those situations which make up our lives.

The response can quite accurately be called "repentance", for it describes, for the vast majority of us at least, a radical turn-about in living; from self-centered to God-centered existence; from self-confidence to confidence in God; from an old, limited interpretation of reality to a new one teeming with possibilities.

The most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this effort is that Jesus' message is riddled with radicality. He seemed to thrive on the new and the unusual. His statements and exhortations were always surprising and challenging. The kingdom of God, for example, was not coming with signs, but rather, "Lo, it is among you". Our response to it must originate not from the lessons learned in our past life but rather must erupt with the freshness and openness of a child whose life is yet to come. In a given situation we must be always prepared to abandon our most trusted presuppositions and have faith in God. Over and over again, Jesus calls us back from the security of conservatism into the freedom that accompanies trust in God. The

emphases in his message are 1) that the kingdom is here and the world is even now being affected in new ways by it, 2) our response must necessarily be of a new and unusual nature and 3) the only way we can attune ourselves to this new situation is to repent--to turn about, to readjust our allegiances and trust in God.

We can see that Jesus' message calls for a drastic change in ourselves, in the way we view the world and in the way we relate to God who is working in the world. This appeal for change often collides with our twentieth century culture where freedom and the ability to change are being seriously questioned, and the result is our inability to understand what Jesus is really talking about. As Christians, we often mimic the words of our Lord, for we are unable to translate Jesus' radical demands into concepts which our world-view can comprehend.

The problem is at least two-fold. First, we have tended to gloss over the really tough questions Jesus puts to us by explaining change in psychologistic or deterministic terms. Second, and this is closely related to the former point, we have not found a conceptual frame of reference which adequately meets both the rigorous scientific/philosophic criteria and the dominical demands. In other words we don't have an adequate way of understanding change.

The Whiteheadian scheme, presented in the next chapter, goes farther than any other in meeting both these requirements. In order more fully to understand its helpfulness, we will discuss the process view in relation to more familiar and less adequate theories of change.

CHAPTER II

A PROCESS VIEW OF CHANGE

As indicated earlier, this foray into process thought will attempt to relay as honestly as possible Whitehead's concepts of change--how it can take place, where it can occur and why it can take place at all. This chapter will be much more philosophical than theological for it is imperative that we understand the cosmological view which gave Whitehead his unusual potential for helping us to understand the nature of change. With his process cosmology in mind, we can then proceed to relate it to the message of Jesus and his call for radical personal change.

The idea and apparent fact of change has dominated philosophical thought for centuries. The facts that we all experience changing relationships with our world and that we all seem to be able to make an effect on our environment have prompted thinkers to explain the nature of reality in such a way as to accommodate these phenomena. Theories have ranged from the Buddhist view "that becoming is the universal form of reality", and so all that is is change, to a pure solipsistic "I" in which nothing changes (or even exists) apart from illusions perceived in my subjectivity.¹ In the solipsistic view, which of course is rarely held seriously, relationships are no more than interpreted

¹Charles Hartshorne, "The Development of Process Philosophy", in Ewert H. Cousins (ed.) Process Theology (New York: Newman Press, 1971), p. 49.

illusions and consequently the changes experienced in these relationships are also illusory. This explanation, however, cuts against all experience and intuition and leads one to a meaningless consciousness of interacting projections of the mind. This fact, among others, has led philosophers to trust our experiences and affirm the reality of the "otherness" which we all perceive and, consequently, to affirm the changes involving and involved in these realities. Once affirmed as real, the problem becomes one of explaining the "why" and "how" of change. The nature of and reasons for change are controversial topics and ones which have considerable relevance today. In this paper the "why" and "how" of change in the thought of Whitehead will be presented against the backdrop of generalized, but nonetheless helpful, typologies.

Until quite recently (and to a large extent even yet), the Western mind viewed reality as composed of substances which entered into changing relationships with other substances and which were altered in appearance by various attributes. The changes perceived were not changes in the substances, but rather were changes in their location, in their particular qualities, or even in the eye of the beholder. This explanation of reality fits very well into our common perception. We do perceive things like trees which seem to endure through time and changes. They seem to change in appearance but not in essence. As scientific investigation began to push back the boundaries of "perceivable" substance, molecules and finally atoms were posited as the substances which really endured and entered into the changing relation-

ships with one another. Beyond the atomic level, what we call "elements" disappear and the "parts" of atoms are left. Still, these parts have endurance and, in fact, combine to make up all that we perceive in the forms of atoms and molecules. This doctrine of substantialism is widely held today and, for most purposes, is an adequate explanation of perceived reality. There are, however, fundamental problems with substantialism, problems which ought to be important to persons other than long-haired metaphysicians.

In the first place, substantialism is being challenged almost daily by the scientific discoveries of sub-atomic particles which have both particle and wave characteristics. Things like quarks, mesons and photons appear to have no substance as we know it (rather they seem to be pulses of energy) and yet, 1) they exist with a spontaneity of their own and 2) they seem to be the elements of the parts of the atoms which have "substance". The problem is that "substance" doesn't seem to be able to be divided into ever smaller bits of substance. Rather, there seems to be a point at which substance disappears and yet something is left. If the basic components of the world aren't substantial, it seems that either we are being massively deluded or "substances" occur mysteriously somewhere between non-substantive forces (energy) and atoms. Ironically, substantist inquiry has led to non-substantial entities.

A second major problem is that substantialism only accounts for what we perceive, what can be seen, touched or in some way measured. Scientific concern for this dimension of reality has cast the religious

interests in spirit, power, soul, love and emotion in a very suspicious light for these interests are not measurable and therefore are of dubious reality. Without the adequate, accepted logical "proofs" for the reality of these spiritual concerns religions have taken a battering. However, the fact remains that we do experience these spiritual dimensions of life, and our present frustrations with the conflicts between the sciences and the humanities demonstrates the reality of this dimension in our existence. Substantialism is primarily concerned with perceptions. The vast majority of people (and other living things as well) experience things that they don't perceive through the senses. Thirdly, substantialism is failing adequately to explain even the obvious facts of memory, life, ideas and psychic experiences. The complex "realities" of ideas, memories, dreams and life itself continue to elude substantialist inquiries into their natures.

The dilemma is a very interesting and profoundly penetrating one. Concerned with explaining the nature of the measurable, perceivable phenomena science winds up on the one hand, positing non-substantial entities and on the other, ignoring at least one major dimension which, in spite of the persuasive power of scientific logic and empiricism, is radically affirmed by common experience.

Against this all too brief and all too general picture the true originality and comprehensiveness of Whitehead's doctrine can perhaps be better understood. Whitehead transforms the definition of change and weaves the concepts of novelty and creativity into the very essence of reality.

Whitehead begins with experience, not with sense perception, which is a high, rare and complex abstraction. Individual "drops of experience" are the "final real things of which the world is made up."² Everything that is is an actual entity and these actual entities are the reasons for everything that is,³ Tables, trees, memories and ideas are alike in that they are made up of actual entities, complexly and interdependently graded and combined. While there are vast differences between a crystal of quartz and a psychic experience, these differences are merely differences in degree, not in kind. In all cases, the reasons for these two types of occasions are explained in terms of actual entities. The notion of "substance" is transformed into that of "actual entity"⁴ and the notion of an actual entity as the unchanging subject of change is completely abandoned...the ancient doctrine that 'no one crosses the same river twice' is extended. No thinker thinks twice, and, to put the matter more generally, no subject experiences twice.⁵

Whitehead's actual entities or "occasions of experience"⁶ account for what is important and apparent in perception, for what is experienced in memory, psyche, soul and spirit, and for the whole wealth of unconscious influence the past continually exerts on the present.

² Alfred N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 27-28.

³ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶ Alfred N. Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 179.

In order to present the unusual way Whitehead comes down on both sides of many questions without being nonsensical, I will discuss his doctrine of change in response to three prominent and generally stated philosophical positions on the subject. These positions are determinism, freedom and supernaturalism. Each has been lifted up at one time or another in various forms to describe the basic reasons for the experienced reality of change.

Determinism is the doctrine that all that is is the result of the past. All changes, shifts and alternations in the web that is the world are the result of complex, but theoretically completely explicable occurrences in the past. This "Billiard Ball" theory sees all change as necessary, unavoidable and, given enough knowledge, totally predictable. Even such individual characteristics as personality traits can be explained deterministically in terms of past occurrences and experiences which not only shaped but also directed the formation of the present personality. Often God is given the role of Prime Mover who sets all things in motion, steps back and watches it unfold. Determinism holds that any given entity is what it is because of the past forces upon it. Individual freedom is an illusion and even the concept of an illusion is a determined event.

Carried through consistently, determinism is extremely depressing. But that everything that happens is largely the result of the past is continuously confirmed by our experience. We are, in fact, influenced strongly by our past. Indeed, at times it seems that we have little control, if any, over our destinies. The way we look, the

way we dress and the way we act are largely the result of conditioning, both genetic and cultural. Whitehead affirms this basic structure of dependence on the past.

The character of an actual entity is finally governed by its datum; whatever be the freedom of feeling arising in the concrescence, there can be no transgression of the limitations of capacity inherent in the datum. The datum both limits and supplies. It follows from this doctrine that the character of an organism depends on that of its environment.⁷

Every actual entity arises out of its datum. It has no choice over its datum, which is the "givenness" of its situation. Obviously, it cannot arise out of any other datum than the datum out of which it arises. In its concrescence, the actual entity takes account of its datum and establishes a perfectly definite bond with every entity in its universe. The entire past impinges on the concrescing actual entity--an unavoidable past which unavoidably must be dealt with by that entity. "The whole world conspires to produce a new creation."⁸ The world's "conspiracy" is the realistic determinism which Whitehead recognizes. The production of a "new creation" goes beyond determinism.

A second way to explain change is to say that all things determine themselves. Whatever is present is not past and consequently is different from the past or else it would be the past. This difference is the result of the freedom of all things to become what they are and, at higher stages of the evolutionary process, what they want to be. The advantage of this sort of view is that it recognizes our innate

⁷Whitehead, Process..., p. 168.

⁸Alfred N. Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: World Press, 1960), p. 109.

sense of being able to do what we want to do, irrespective of the past. Taken to extremes, this view is, of course, ridiculous, for some freedoms are not available to us. (We can't become birds no matter how badly we may want to.) In more subdued tones, however, the concept of self-determination corresponds with our experience of ourselves as purposive agents and shapers of our and others' reality. "Authenticity" and "actualization" are ways in which this freedom has been described and these words give verbalization to a large portion of our experience. Whitehead attributes freedom of a slightly different sort to all entities in the universe, not just to the more highly evolved forms. This freedom consists in "how" each actual entity takes account of the past. "How an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is."⁹

The breath of feeling which creates a new individual fact has an origination not wholly traceable to the mere data. It conforms to the data, in that it feels the data. But the how of feeling, though it is germane to the data, is not fully determined by the data.¹⁰

There are many possible ways that the past can be synthesized so that the actual entity establishes a perfectly definite bond with all the entities in the universe. The "potential unity of many entities"

acquires the real unity of one actual entity.¹¹

In each concrescence whatever is determinable is determined, but there is always a remainder for the decision of the subject-superject of that concrescence...This final decision is the reaction of the unity of the whole to its own internal determination. This reaction is the final modification of emotion, appreciation, and purpose.¹²

⁹ Whitehead, Process..., p. 34.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 131.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹² Ibid., p. 41.

Thus an "actual occasion" is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the 'many' which it unifies."¹³ "Creativity" is what Whitehead calls that character of reality, "that ultimate principle by which the many... become the one actual occasion."¹⁴ All actual entities, from God to the "most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space" are novel, at least insofar as they uniquely synthesize the entire universe into a real satisfaction. "No entity can be divorced from the notion of creativity."¹⁵ The entities which make up a rock certainly do not possess the creative capacity of the entities which comprised the consciousness of Albert Schweitzer. Metaphysically, however, they both are "self-creative" and consequently novel. Their difference is one of degree and complexity, not of kind. In all instances of actuality there is the reception of influence from the past which is called "causal efficacy". This "causal efficacy" is mediated by and partially made up of feelings of immediately antecedent occasions objectified by the con-
 creting actuality, but all the actual entities in the past make their contribution.

All actual entities in the actual world, relative to a given actual entity as "subject" are necessarily "felt" by that subject, though in general vaguely. An actual entity as felt is said to be "objectified" for that subject.¹⁶

There is to a large degree general reproduction by the con-
 creting occasion of the data received. There is also the unavoidable expression of novelty for the whole process is governed by the

¹³ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 324.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

subjective aim of the occasion which seeks to achieve a particular satisfaction of the data.¹⁷ It soon becomes apparent that the world is not static.¹⁸ "The universe is always new", for each actual entity, once satisfied is a new, creative synthesis of all that went before it.¹⁹

The world is self-creative; and the actual entity as self-creating creature passes into its immortal function of part-creator of the transcendent world.²⁰

Whitehead's scheme attributes freedom to every entity and yet avoids separating that entity from its past.

If this were all Whitehead said about the novelty of each occasion, his system, while interesting and unique, would be very abstract indeed, for it would not account for the differentiated types of entities in the world. The order of the world would be simply the chance novelty that occurred at any given "cut" in the process. The occasions comprising human consciousness would be no more than pure happenstance novelties which at any moment could fade into more and more mundane syntheses. There would be no guarantee that in its selection of a particular actualization from the vast plethora of possibilities a conerescing occasion would not reverse all previous trends toward complexity. There would be no reason why evil, destructive (for future occasions) satisfactions would not emerge in ever-

¹⁷John B. Cobb, Jr., A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 36.

¹⁸Whitehead, Process..., p. 365.

¹⁹Ibid., 354.

²⁰Ibid., p. 130.

increasing numbers. In short, there would be no guarantee of anything predictable, useful or exciting in the world.

Whitehead goes on to posit a form of supernaturalism in which God is the actual entity which insures that the order and basic consistency of the world continues. It is to this aspect of his thought that I finally turn.

It has been a habit of philosophers and theologians to employ the concept of God arbitrarily in order to help systematize and gloss over the inconsistencies of their theories. Whitehead rejects this practice²¹ and endeavors to show that

God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification.²²

This amounts to affirming that God is not the most ultimate aspect of all that is, for God, like all actual entities, is subject to the categorical obligations.

The presumption that there is only one genus of actual entities constitutes an ideal of cosmological theory to which the philosophy of organism endeavors to conform.²³

Though there are specific differences between the nature of God and the nature of any other occasion, God has most of the characteristics of any actual entity. God is a unity of conceptual and physical experience.²⁴ God is in concrescence,²⁵ has satisfaction²⁶ and a superjective

²¹Ibid., p. 289.

²²Ibid., p. 521.

²³Ibid., p. 168.

²⁴Ibid., p. 24,

²⁵Ibid., p. 47, 54, 134.

²⁶Ibid., p. 48, 135.

nature.²⁷ God has subjective aim²⁸ and subjective forms of feeling.²⁹

God exists subjectively for itself and is objectively existent and therefore "prehensible" by other actual entities.³⁰ In these ways God is like all actual entities. God is different from all other actual entities, first of all, in that God is primordial.³¹ God is not to be thought of as an occasion, but rather as an entity.³²

Viewed as primordial, he is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of possibility. In this aspect, he is not before all creation, but with all creation.³³

These conceptual realizations of possibility in God are unbounded by the fetters of actuality.

By reason of this primordial actuality, there is an order in the relevance of eternal objects to the process of creation...The primordial nature of God is the acquirement by creativity of a primordial character.³⁴

One side of God's nature is constituted by his conceptual experience. This experience is the primordial fact in the world limited by no actuality which it presupposes...The other side originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world and then acquires integration with the primordial side.³⁵

This other side, the consequent nature of God, is the weaving of God's physical feelings of the world upon the infinite conceptual experience of possibilities comprising the primordial nature.³⁶ The consequent nature of God, which occurs with the coming-into-being of every actual

²⁷Ibid., p. 135, 532.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 134-135, 522, 524.

²⁹Ibid., p. 50, 134, 522.

³⁰Ibid., p. 47, 377-378.

³¹Ibid., p. 116.

³²Ibid., p. 135.

³³Ibid., p. 521.

³⁴Ibid., p. 522.

³⁵Ibid., p. 524.

³⁶Ibid.

entity (for God prehends every actual entity), completes God's totality and enables God to both physically feel concrescent occasions and in conjunction with the primordial side offer them initial aims. "The world is felt in a unison of immediacy."³⁷

God prehends every actuality for what it can be in such a perfected system--its sufferings, its sorrows, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy--woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is always immediate, always many, always one, always with novel advance, moving onward and never perishing.³⁸

By reason of God's primordial nature, there is the possibility for creative order in the world. By reason of God's presence with every entity, this potential for order becomes actual. "Unlimited possibility and abstract creativity can procure nothing."³⁹ God gives creativity a primordial character,⁴⁰ The world of actual occasions gives creativity a consequent actuality. The interplay between actuality and possibility is guided and shaped by God's presentation of a particular initial aim to each concrescing entity. The concrescing entity must take account of that aim--how it takes account of it, and all other relevant data, belongs to the freedom of the entity and constitutes its subjective aim (satisfaction).

As suspected, Whitehead comes down on both sides of the major issues in respect to change. He affirms the existence of actual entities as the final real things which make up all that is experienced.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 524.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 525.

³⁹ Whitehead, Religion..., p. 146.

⁴⁰ Whitehead, Process..., p. 522.

These entities are, on the one hand determined by the past of which they are forced to take account. On the other hand, each entity is free in exactly how it takes account of its past. The intervention of God into this process is not to explain exceptions to the theory but rather to confirm its most fundamental tenets. There is order in the world because of God. There is creative advance because of God. There are grades of experiencing entities because of God. As an actual entity, God, too, is bound by the categoreal obligations and explanations in offering the best, most creative possibilities for satisfaction to each concreting actuality. These offerings, however, are finally transcended by the concreting entity as it constitutes its own satisfaction.

Every actual entity is determined by its past, by God and by itself. Because every occasion synthesizes the entire universe, the universe is always new and always one. Because every entity adds to the world its own unique existence, it is co-creator with God. Because of the infinite possibilities available to it, every actual entity has the potential for radical novelty.

It can be seen that Whitehead transforms the notion of change. Change is recognized as a part of the process that is the world and yet it is not attributable to any actual entity for "every actual entity is what it is, and is with its definite status in the universe, determined by its internal relations to other actual entities."⁴¹

An actual entity does not change, it never moves.⁴² What we

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴² Ibid., p. 113.

perceive as changes are really societies of successive actual entities, each exhibiting a different spatio-temporal standpoint, but appearing 'en masse' as a moving or changing body with a history of local change.⁴³

For Whitehead, "the fundamental meaning of the notion of 'change' is the difference between actual occasions comprised in some determinate event,"⁴⁴ Complex societies of entities with faculties for memory, sense-perception and consciousness can experience events in changing relations, but these events are composed of actual entities, unchangeable and immortal.

Whitehead shifts the focus away from "substance-undergoing-change" to entities which are a change, but are in themselves changeless. Because it is different than anything which has gone before it, an actual entity is a change. Because it exists forevermore as an object to be taken account of by future concrescing occasions, it endures objectively. Change and endurance are seen to be necessary explanations of reality. The extent to which a particular occasion expresses radical novelty depends on 1) the data it is prehending (this includes God's initial aim for its satisfaction) and 2) the way it handles those data in achieving actuality. The differences in the world, the order of the world, which are guided into organization by God's primordial and continual orderings, are differences in the extent of the novelty which is expressed by each new occasion.

The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order...Order is not sufficient. What is

⁴³ Ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

required is something much more complex. It is order entering upon novelty, so that the massiveness of order does not degenerate into mere repetition and so that the novelty is always reflected upon a background of system...It belongs to the goodness of the world that its settled order should deal tenderly with the faint discordant light of the dawn of another age. The old dominance should be transformed into the firm foundations, upon which new feelings arise, drawing their intensities from delicacies of contrast between system and freshness.⁴⁵

The world is like the animal body--through it the treasures of the past environment are poured into the living occasion.⁴⁶

This discussion of Whitehead's doctrine of change has been all too brief. If, however, Whitehead's ideas and insights into the nature of change have been made intelligible, then the effort has been worthwhile. It remains for us to build upon this conceptual framework a cosmology of change that is specifically suited to accommodate both the Whiteheadian frame of reference and Jesus' unusual demands. I believe we will find that the process view of change is adequate for the task of uniting the two.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 515.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 516.

CHAPTER III

A CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGY OF CHANGE

We have said that Jesus' message is riddled with radicality. This is both the genius and the difficulty of his significance. On the one hand he called people into a new exciting existence, free from the fetters of the past. On the other hand, we find that such a change is exceedingly difficult. We can speak and write about "radical response" in terms of drastic personal change, but when the issue comes down to "changing" or even understanding how the changes can take place, our explanations often become fuzzy and depressing. As we saw in Chapter II, explanations of the "how" of change have fallen into three general categories; determinism, freedom and supernaturalism. Each of these general categories both accounts for a portion of reality and falls short of a satisfactory explanation of it. When the "hard" questions are asked of each category the explanation of radical change in persons all too often devolves into psychologistic, deterministic or utterly unrealistic reasons, none of which alone is adequate.

Jesus saw the world differently from the way we do, or his contemporaries did, for that matter. In spite of this different "vision of reality", or because of it, he was able to speak decisively and persuasively about the nature and dimensions of personal change. His concept of personal change was tied to his belief in the importance of our relationship to God. His parabolic illustrations of unprecedented responses (i.e., Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son) and his illustrative

logia (i.e., coat/cloak, second mile) indicated that he had unusual insights into the nature of change and the potential in each of us for obedience to God's wishes.

This writer believes that Whitehead's philosophy, coupled with the work of key process theologians (i.e., John Cobb and David Griffin) can move us a few important steps closer to understanding and explaining the nature of reality in such a way as to be able to make sense of much of Jesus' radical call and challenge to change.

In the early part of the essay we saw how Whitehead's philosophy accounted for and added new dimensions to the concept of change. It now remains for us to explore the adequacy of the Whiteheadian doctrines in explaining Jesus' radical call to repent. We believe that such an application of Whitehead will not only more adequately account for Jesus' unique expectations but also can have an impact on Christian preaching techniques in the present day.

By reason of God's primordial nature, there is the possibility for order and novelty in the world. By reason of God's presence with every entity (the consequent nature) this potential for novel order becomes actual. The interplay between actuality and possibility is guided and shaped by God's presentation of a particular initial or ideal aim to each concrescing entity. As a part of its data, that entity must take account of God's aim for it--how it takes account of it, as we have seen, belongs to the freedom of the entity and results in a unique synthesis which is its satisfaction.

God is thus omniscient, in that all possibilities are contained

and known in the primordial nature, God is also personal, for he is present in each actual entity in the form of its ideal aim, God is also purposeful, in that the presentation of the ideal aim to the con-
 creting actuality is in line with God's plan, which is "that all the
 entities of the world experience existence as good, and that they con-
 stantly experience it better."¹ God is also changing, for the world
 affects and is affected by God. In the concrete actuality of the con-
 sequent nature, God is perfectly relative, affected by everything in
 the changing flux that is the world.² In the sense of God's abstract
 essence, God "changeth not", for the purpose and knowledge remain the
 same. "But God's purposive action is always changing, for he does
 something new in each moment, responding to the world's decisions and
 then influencing it in line with his eternal purpose."³

Up to this point, we have spoken of the nature of reality at
 the level of actual entities, how they constitute themselves, and how
 God affects them. It can be seen that according to this scheme, change
 takes place atomically, that is, it is not a state participated in by
 any enduring substance. No entity changes and no entity can experi-
 ence change. Rather, the notion arises only in highly developed sys-
 tems of entities with faculties for memory, sense-perception and con-
 sciousness. These incredibly complex systems perceive "substances" in
 changing relations relative to the categories of time and space. This

¹David R. Griffin, A Process Christology (Philadelphia: West-
 minster Press, 1973), p. 183.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

is not to say that change does not take place, on the contrary, change is basic to the structure of Whitehead's cosmology. "Creativity", "novelty" and "change" are all words describing the way the universe constitutes itself in tandem with God's persuasive guidelines for its development.

The shift that occurs in Whitehead's notion of change is a subtle but vastly helpful one. The confusing talk of substances-undergoing-changes is replaced by entities, each of which is a change. God's action in the world is not unnatural or super-natural, but is a necessary, controlling part of the process.

We can now move from the level of actual entities and individual occasions to the more complex and ironically more relevant level of personal human behavior and development. In moving to this level, we are in one sense back at the beginning of process thought, for Whitehead grounded his ontology in an analysis of a moment of human experience. From this starting point he moved to the more basic levels and categories of reality.

As conscious persons we are all aware of experiences. These experiences, which occur very quickly and diversely, make up what has often been called our "soul" or our "mind" or our "psyche".

In addition to taking conscious account of the experiences of the human being, the mind to a considerable extent controls the functioning of the organism as a whole. Whitehead refers to this final

level of structure as "the presiding occasion".⁴ The human body as a whole is a fantastically complex society of individual entities with the mind as the succession of presiding or dominant members. "The body which is composed of billions of individuals, is the immediate environment of the mind. In each moment of its experience the mind receives countless impulses or influences from the whole body through the brain. The mind constitutes itself in each moment on the basis of these influences, and in so doing it makes decisions that become impulses affecting the brain cells and therefore the rest of the body."⁵

The presiding occasion can attain such levels of experience and dominance only because the human body is so organized as to make this possible. "It is constructed so that there is a constant flow of novelty from all its parts to the brain."⁶

Thus it can be said that the total human being is a monarchical society. The mind is the monarch, but it is an extremely sensitive and sympathetic one, for the experiences of one or many of the other members of the society are internal to it. It shares the injury of a foot, for example, by feeling pain. It shares in the exercise of the muscles by feeling exhilaration. The mind as a monarch also is purposeful, giving "aims" to the actual entities in the brain to relay on to the rest of the organism. In these senses, the mind and its relationship

⁴ Alfred N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 166.

⁵ Griffin, pp. 208-209.

⁶ John B. Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 49.

to the body is comparable to God and his relationship to the world.⁷

God gives aims to each of the actual entities in the world. God's relation to the world is analogous to the relation of the mind to the body. God is aware of all the possible ways in which a particular occasion may concreate or constitute itself. God also has a purpose for each entity, a purpose which if followed would be the most conducive to the maximization of the quality of life at all levels. The way God's purpose gets introduced into the world is through the ideal aim which is offered to each becoming occasion, an aim of which that occasion must take account. In the lower forms of societies, i.e., molecules and other simple systems, God's ideal aim tends to take the form of stability and order in the processive life of that system. In the system that is a rock, for example, God's aims for the entities which constitute that rock in a particular moment are probably very much the same as were the aims given to it hundreds of years ago. Because of the order established at lower levels, an order which exemplified stability far more than creativity, it was possible for highly creative and very fragile occasions to emerge. The human mind is the most highly creative entity (or more accurately "society of entities") we know of apart from God. It is also extremely unstable, requiring the entire entourage of the body in order to exist. For such an entity, whose potential for creative becoming is so great, God's ideal aims will be different from the aims offered to the cells of a

⁷ Griffin, pp. 208-209. The material in this paragraph is based directly on Cobb's and Griffin's work on the mind/God analogy.

hand or an eye. God's aim for the presiding occasion of a human being is an aim which points that occasion toward an ideal possibility for its satisfaction.⁸ Of course, the presiding occasion may in its freedom choose not to actualize God's aim for it, or it may actualize any degree of conformity to that aim. Whatever it does with its ideal aim, the entity must take account of it, either positively, negatively or, as is more often the case, in a manner which combines the two.

We can see, then, that Whitehead's cosmology places change at the most basic level of existence and seeks to work out the apparent stability of the world from this flexing, processive base. Change is not "explained" in the system as much as change explains reality.

With change and process posited at the ground of reality, it is much easier to understand how change can take place in the more highly evolved systems of entities. Indeed, as we saw earlier in chapter two, when novelty and freedom are prime elements in reality, it is difficult to understand the stability which we all experience. In response to this difficulty it must be remembered that it is God who provides the "ideal aims" which persuade the becoming occasions of the world to actualize in such ways that there is stability, or rather what we experience as stability, through time. The fact that there are what we perceive to be enduring substances is as much due to God's work as is the fact that we also perceive creative advance and newness. The order of the world, shaped by God and taken account of by the becoming occasion, affects the degree to which that occasion's actualization is

⁸Cobb, p. 96.

novel. Indiscriminate, random change is highly unstable and is not conducive to the goals God has in mind. The order of the past and the influence of God's ideal aims in the past and in the present moment of its actualization tend to insure that the becoming occasion conforms in its novelty in such a way that it can be usefully built upon by future occasions.

Thanks to the protective order provided by our bodies, there exists within us a presiding occasion which is capable of actualizing especially unique and creative possibilities. As we have seen, the past data of which any individual occasion must take account, the ideal aim provided by God for it, and the inherent freedom of that occasion all contribute to the eventual actualization of one of the possibilities open to it. The occasions which comprise our unique essence as human personalities are ontologically no different. They too must take account of the past; however, because of their unique status within the animal body, God's aims for them can be especially creative and this factor coupled with the unusual array of possibilities open to them results in a being with unique powers of self-analysis, self-transformation and a special sensitivity to God's directives for its life.

It is in speaking of God's ideal aims for the presiding occasion of the human being that Whitehead's cosmology becomes especially relevant in explaining Jesus' message. We saw in chapter one that Jesus' message demanded repentance, which we defined as a radical turning around in one's relationship to God. We also questioned whether

or not such radical change was physically and ontologically possible. Whitehead's cosmology shows us that, indeed, such radical change is possible, first of all 1) because in each moment a new, novel entity is taking shape, 2) because each entity has the freedom to constitute itself in any number of ways and 3) because God is present with each becoming occasion, offering that concrescing actuality an ideal aim for its constitution.

Jesus demanded change by calling for our repentance. Jesus also saw change taking place in the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. In both of these cases, Jesus' vision of reality was such that he saw change as possible and furthermore as necessary for salvation.

Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is here and there. It is in the past and in the future and it is in conflict in this present time with destructive forces. Such a vision fits well with process cosmology. The process view sees God's presence everywhere influencing, persuading and luring the world to an ever higher level of existence. God as creator has done this in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Furthermore, God's power in the world is a persuasive power or else there would be no freedom for the entities. It is rooted in concern and love for each occasion and is specifically focussed in each instance to aim the developing actuality in that direction which is best for it and for the world as a whole. As a persuasive rather than a coercive power it is possible for God's purposes to be thwarted by the freedom of each entity ultimately to determine itself. The working out of God's will that we all have life and have it abundantly

is all too often misinterpreted or ignored and the resulting pain and suffering cuts against God's purposes. With infinite wisdom and patience, however, God continually picks up the pieces of the conflicts in the present age and molds new aims for future occasions differently in the light of the past frustrations.

The picture of God given us by Jesus is of a gentle father, a loving teacher who feels our trials and supports us in them. God is depicted as intensely personal, relating to each of us in every situation. Again, such a view is consistent with process thought. God, as the "aim giver" is vitally concerned for us and intimately involved (more intimately than we are ever aware) in our development. We can honestly refer to God as in the deepest sense personal while at the same time affirming his omnipresence. Truly God is with us at all times, and it is very reassuring to know that God is also "with" all the other entities in the world as well.

Such a view of God dovetails rather well into the vision of the kingdom of God and our relationship to it. The response Jesus expected to his proclamation of the kingdom was repentance. He called for a radical about-face in our priorities, our allegiances and vision of reality. The result of this repentance was trust in and obedience to God's will.

The concept of repentance is intelligible when the "soul" of a person is understood as a succession of presiding occasions. In Whiteheadian terms the drastic change Jesus demanded in our relationship to God means to become more aware of God's aims for our lives and

be more willing and, hence, able to actualize them. The conscious effort to "get in tune" with God's aim for us is, as far as is known, a uniquely human ability and is a function of the presiding occasion's unique capacities.

"Repenting" means to turn from self- or occasion-centered goals to God-centered ones. This change depends on trust in God's wisdom and issues in obedience to God's purposes. Dependent trust of this type is very close to Jesus' exhortation in Mark 10:15 that we enter the kingdom of God as a child.

Also involved in Jesus' call for repentance is the giving up of worldly presuppositions and biases. We found that many of the extreme, even ridiculous demands found in the logia of Jesus were intended not to precipitate specific forms of obedience but to enable one to transcend the fetters of worldly biases and bases for concern. The world is not bad, neither is it to be avoided. Jesus' life exemplified his confidence in the basic goodness of the world for he believed that God was in control and he did not avoid its reality by circumventing difficult situations. His ability to cope with the world's exigencies, however, was not based in the world's confusing and conflicting selection of rules and principles. His allegiance lay with God and from this standpoint flowed his actions in the world.

Turning our lives over to God's power and wisdom means trying to align ourselves with our special 'ideal aims'. Such a shift in allegiance from world to God is not a cop-out, but is the only adequate way to cope with the incredible complexity of which we are a part.

When we recognize that God is in the world with us and within us, working to heal and improve, our view of reality is transformed and we interpret our perceptions differently. In such a vision, optimism replaces pessimism, failures are seen as temporary and the power behind the developing creation becomes more and more evident.

Finally, process thought casts some constructive light upon the dilemma of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus emphasized that God loves us as we are, fraught with sin and error. God is the one who is ultimately in control and his love for us is fully cognizant of even our deepest fears and doubts. Our awareness of this love should deter us from seeking our security anywhere else. We already have it in God's love for us. God forgives us by continuing to urge us to become the best persons we can become in spite of failings in the past. This past, while it is important, is unchangeable. What counts is the present and the future. We are all "new persons" in an always new present.⁹ This knowledge helps us accept God's forgiveness of our sins and moves us toward actualizing the ever more creative and God-inspired possibilities before us.

We have seen in this chapter that Whitehead's philosophy illumines the problems of change without sacrificing either the effect of the past, the freedom of the present or the efficacy of God's power. We have also seen how Jesus' message and the implicit and explicit assumptions which are a part of it can fit into the Whiteheadian scheme. I do not believe that the wedding of these two "visions of reality"

⁹ Griffin, pp. 234-235.

puts excessive strain on either. In fact, the two seem to complement each other with resultant good effects. The Whiteheadian scheme gives us a more comprehensible look at the natures and qualities of the God/world relationship. Jesus' input is tremendously instructive as well, for in a unique and personal way he demonstrates and leads us on to a new and more wholesome life with God.

We have said that Jesus' radical call can be made understandable to our modern mentalities. It remains for us to explore the possibilities opened up for the communication of the Christian message when it is formulated within the Whiteheadian framework. In the next chapter, I will look into the impact of this Christian cosmology of change on the Christian preaching endeavor, offering suggestions and critiquing a sermon. It will be found not only that this cosmology is helpful in systematizing and organizing the teaching of Jesus, but also that it enables the preacher to call honestly for the radical changes demanded by Jesus (and the situations of this day)--a call which preachers have been increasingly hesitant to make.

CHAPTER IV

A HOMILETIC APPLICATION

This final chapter will seek to make useful the insights and conclusions drawn in the previous chapter. In it we saw how the process view of reality can help illuminate many of the confusing aspects of Jesus' message. We recognize that while there are many diverse applications of process philosophy to Christian concepts, the one specific problem on which we focussed was the problem of change and repentance. We found the Whiteheadian/Christian cosmology extremely helpful in balancing the modern view of the world with Jesus' message and vision. Finally, we gained an inkling into some of the ramifications which could follow from such a synthesis.

In this chapter we will follow through into an analysis of the application of this Christian cosmology of change to preaching. The importance of preaching to the total Christian experience can hardly be overstated. As proclaimer, instructor, challenger and counselor, the preacher's role has been and still is of indubitable value to the listening congregation and the larger Christian community. The preacher attempts to respond to the living of the present in terms of the Old and New Testament concepts which Jesus employed. This effort is a complex one for the preacher must both face the stubborn facts of the reality of the day and at the same time interpret these facts in such a way that they can be illuminated by the Christian message.

As the scientific world-view became more and more persuasive and the modern understanding of the Christian world-view became more and more inadequate, all too often this process was reversed. Instead of interpreting present facts in such a way that they could be illuminated by the Gospel, the preacher reinterpreted the Gospel to "fit" the "facts" of the present.

To a certain degree, a reinterpretation of Jesus' message is unavoidable and even necessary. However, if in the face of popular scientism the unique challenge of Jesus is lost, then an effort must be made to reconcile the two.

Such an effort has been made in preceding sections of this dissertation and in the pages that follow, I will lay out six contributions which a Whiteheadian/Christian cosmology can make to the task of preaching. I will then critically analyze a sermon in the light of these suggestions, with criticism especially focussed on the problem of change.

First of all, and most obviously, the Whiteheadian/Christian schema gives new intelligibility to many of the words and concepts employed in theological discussion. This isn't to say that words like "soul", "faith", "repentance", "grace" and "freedom" were unintelligible prior to their clarification in this paper. In fact, their definitions were often very clear and specific. One advantage of the Whiteheadian/Christian cosmology, however, is that it provides us with a world-view which allows a clear use of primarily Christian terms without contradicting either personal experience or the discoveries of

science. An understanding of these words which fits into a larger than Christian world-view will give the preacher greater flexibility both in coping with the scriptures and in relaying their messages.

Second, the preacher can speak in new ways about the character of grace and forgiveness. Both of these concepts lie deeply embedded in this cosmology. David Griffin summarizes too succinctly to paraphrase:

Since the one who ultimately matters, God himself, loves us, we need not strive inordinately to secure our own place in the scheme of things. And since this God loves us, in spite of the sin and errors in our past, we can become free from any unnecessary domination of that past over our present and future. Since God forgives us, continuing to urge us to actualize that which is best for us in our present situation, there is no reason to continue to fret about the past, which cannot be changed.¹

Grace is recognizable in the fact that God is always with and within us, constantly offering us love and guidance. Forgiveness lies in the facts that the past is unchangeable and that in the present and future God repeatedly urges us to be better than we were.

Third, the preacher can honestly and forcefully call for radical repentance NOW. Once it is understood that in every moment we are offered the aims by which to turn our lives from ourselves toward God, "Repentance Now" becomes relevant. A further dimension of the radical now of repentance is the notion that the very challenge to change becomes a force in the data of which the listeners must take account. The challenge can't be ignored--it will affect the future of the hearer.

¹David R. Griffin, A Process Christology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 183.

Fourth, the preacher can speak positively about the future. Although the past effects the present and, hence, the future, we know also that God's ideal aims and the freedom of the participating entities causally effect the present and future. The causal efficacy of God's aims coupled with our freedom results in a future that is truly open. We know that God seeks to improve the quality of life at all levels and this faith in God's power and wisdom gives us hope. What the future will be is something over which we have some control. We are not helpless pawns caught in a gigantic power struggle between God and the past. We have power as well and when our power is coupled with God's the future looks bright indeed.

Fifth, the preacher can call us to the awareness of God's presence in a troubled world. The Whiteheadian/Christian cosmology lets us see God and the world constantly developing, changing and working out the problems which spring from the freedoms and controls of the structure. Again, our faith in God's wisdom and patience can help us be patient and can also open our eyes to God's reconciling efforts and inspire us to become more a part of them. God's purpose remains the same; the specific strategies utilized to achieve it change in each instant. The present is the only door to a better future, the kingdom is here and now, and we can become a part of the establishment of that better future only if we begin now to try to actualize God's wishes for our lives.

Sixth and finally, the preacher can speak with hope about the effects of our efforts in and on the world. This hope has at least

two bases in process theology. First, there is the hope which comes from the belief in God's ability to bring successes out of our worst failures and goodness out of our saddest mistakes. God's power in the world is analogous to the ability of a strong chess player to turn his students' mistakes into ultimate victory. Setbacks, errors and outright confusion can be overcome by God's wisdom and loving power. Our faith is not that we can straighten out the present, but rather that by working with God, we can affect a better and better future in alignment with God's plan.

The second hope which supports our concerned actions in the world stems from the knowledge that God in his all-encompassing wisdom and sensitivity is aware of our efforts, even if no one else ever is. God, as a personal, feeling entity, experiences our motives as we do. God looks upon the heart of our agency and responds to us at that level. We need never to feel that we are alone or that our efforts, however puny or flawed, are unrecognized or ineffective. They always have an effect and they are eternally preserved by God with a sensitivity and a tenderness that supports and reassures us.

We can now proceed to present and criticize a sermon, noting both its correlation to and divergence from these six suggestions. This sermon was delivered in July 1974 to a large congregation in Santa Monica, California.

SERMON: OYSTERS AND OPTIMISM

Scripture: Hosea 4:1-3 and Romans 8:18-21

"Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder. Therefore the land mourns, all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air; and even the fish of the sea are taken away."

The words "the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land" were spoken over 2600 years ago. Hosea was speaking to Israel, the Northern Kingdom, which was enjoying the most prosperous time in its history. This prosperity, however, was short-lived, for it was gained at the expense of lawlessness and impiety. Internally and externally, problems were just around the corner. Mighty Assyria was beginning to flex its muscles and soon it would overrun the entire area. The church was corrupted and the priests were little more than puppets for those who governed. In spite of the warnings from the prophets, Israel refused to change its ways and in Hosea we find the theological statement of the extent of the damage Israel was inflicting on itself.

"The Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land." Like so much of the Old Testament, these words have striking relevance today. Indeed, it does seem as though our world is falling apart. This last March (1974) it seemed as if everything were coming to a head. We were at that time in the middle of the Watergate mess, inflation was growing monthly, the energy crunch was becoming more and more painful, and to top it all off, shortages appeared in almost every

area of the economy. During the gloomy days of last March a bumper sticker was spotted that said "Our God is back, and boy is he mad!" Indeed it almost seems that the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of this land.

The recent release of the House Judiciary committee's transcripts of White House conversations is even more damaging to the President than those he previously released. There remains little doubt that this country will have to endure its second Presidential impeachment in as many centuries. "There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land,"

Promises that "there will be no recession in 1974" and that 1974 will be a prosperous year for all are being eroded by galloping inflation and increasing unemployment. At 10 to 11% a year, this inflation is cutting into savings which are earning only 7-7½ %. "Where do I put my money?" is becoming the question of 1974. "There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land."

As if the actions of the SLA aren't frightening enough, we are told that there are probably 4 to 5 such groups in the Southern California area. Because of their small size these groups are nearly impossible to infiltrate or detect until after they have done their job. According to one newscast, the goal is "assassination". "There is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder."

On a smoggy day in Claremont, we know what Hosea means when he says that the land mourns. Flying in from Minneapolis, descending

from the clear skies into the brown murk of Ontario, we not only saw the land mourning, we tasted and felt it as well. Even the pristine beauty of one of our favorite spots, Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, has been soiled and one can see the result of our collective errors. The magnificent herds of elk are being slowly, genetically brought down to the level of the sickest, weakest of the herd. There aren't enough coyotes and the timber wolves are almost totally gone and consequently without the natural "weeding" process which these natural enemies perform, the weaker elk are propagating. The stately buffalo is looking less and less stately for his coat is getting mottled and moth-eaten. The naturalists tell us this is because there are no more prairie dog towns which provided the natural dust and droppings which the buffalo would instinctively roll around in to clean their fur. Even our national bird is in danger. The single pair of bald eagles in the park have not hatched an egg in seven years. This is because the shells of the eggs have been too weak to hold the embryo. Environmentalists tell us that weak-walled eggs are the result of the DDT the eagles have eaten. "Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air."

For years, economists have predicted that the oceans would be able to provide the necessary food for the hungry masses of humanity. Here was an "undepletable" source of life and sustenance. And yet, already New England cod fishermen are having to go to deeper and ever more distant beds to catch the cod, which have practically disappeared

from those undepletable sources nearer the coast. An editorial in the Los Angeles Times a few weeks back predicted that future military crises will pivot around control of the seas and their food supplies. "And also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, and even the fish of the sea are taken away."

It's very easy to be pessimistic today. We see and hear these gloomy predictions everywhere we look. Crime is up. Inflation is up. Unemployment is up. Limits to Growth, a report by the Club of Rome which is an analysis of past trends of growth and consumption and how they'll affect the future, concludes that if these trends of growth and consumption continue for another fifteen to twenty years the world as we know it will collapse from overpopulation, food and resource depletion and pollution. If past trends continue, our demise is certain, says Limits to Growth. If we, like Israel so long ago, continue in our ways, collapse will be our reward. These are pessimistic words and unfortunately they are soundly grounded in the facts of the situation. And I suppose we need pessimists to keep reminding us of our mistakes and to keep us humble by telling us how bad off we are. We may need them, but the pessimistic perspective is not the Christian perspective.

The Christian stance is founded on Jesus, and Jesus was an optimist of the first order. He saw the potential for beauty and goodness in the lowest, most despicable persons in the society of his day. He was friend to prostitutes and tax collectors and he chose fishermen and common people as his disciples. His faith in them and

in God was wildly optimistic. He believed and he proved that God would support him in this confidence. His disciples and their disciples were infected with his optimism and faith. Paul writes in Romans

8:18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

What Optimism! What Hope! And these words were written at a time when Christians were in the minority. They were being persecuted and martyred and yet they continued to have faith that better things would come of it all. They believed that God would redeem and deliver them from the sufferings of this present time as God redeemed and delivered Jesus.

Because of Jesus and those who followed him, we today have the assurance that God is in control--that in spite of the problems and uncertainties of this present time, in all things God is working for the best--with us, for us and through us, but always for the best.

There's the story of the two brothers. One was a pessimist, always negative, always down, always looking on the dark side. The other was the eternal optimist, always hoping and looking for the best in the situation. The parents of these two boys were quite naturally

concerned over the differences in the ways each of them perceived the world. The pessimist, when given a gift, a bicycle or model, always found some excuse not to be happy with it. Perhaps he couldn't ride the bike or, if he could, then his chances for injury in an accident were increased. Likewise, with the model, he was concerned about ruining the whole thing by making a mistake, so he never began to assemble it. The optimist, on the other hand, was always willing to try anything and was always hopeful about the outcome of his endeavor. Finally, in concern, the parents consulted a psychiatrist who, after hearing the tale of the two brothers, suggested a special treatment. He suggested that they give the optimistic boy a gift which was so inferior to the gift which the pessimistic boy received that the pessimist would see that things are better than he thought and the optimist would get a taste of reality as well. On Christmas day the two boys opened their packages. The pessimist found a set of car keys for a new car which was parked in the driveway. Although he was excited, he soon began to worry about insurance, licensing and repair on such a fine car and before long he had lost all the excitement of the gift and had decided that he could never really enjoy such an automobile. The optimistic brother received a rather large box of horse manure. Upon seeing what was in his package, the optimistic brother looked up with a strange expression on his face and went running madly out of the room. The parents were shocked and ran after the boy until they finally caught up with him. "What is the matter with you? What are you doing?" "Well," he said, "I know there's a horse out here some place and I'm going to

find him!"

This is optimism. And it is illustrative of what Paul was talking about when he wrote "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (Ro. 8:25) Now the optimistic brother was not exactly patient and its true that the sufferings of this present time are real and tragic and require immediate attention. Our patience lies in our certainty that there is a God who is working with us in this present time. Indeed, the creation is groaning in travail and we must work to overcome the pain. But through it all I am confident that there is a horse out there someplace--that God is working to make this world better than it is.

Reinhold Niebuhr, the great theologian and social reformer, once remarked to Harry Emerson Fosdick: "If you'll be a pessimist with me decade by decade, I will be an optimist with you eon by eon." Jesus was an optimist eon by eon and so must we Christians be optimistic through him. We have faith in the future, we believe in the future not because we believe in the wealth and the prosperity of the United States, but because we believe in God. We have faith in the future, not because we believe in politics, politicians, laws and court systems, but because we believe in God. We have faith in the future, not because we have faith in the skill and ingenuity of human beings, but because we believe in God.

Faith and confidence in the future through our belief in God's power give us strength and confidence in the present. You may remember

the story of Thomas Edison and his efforts to discover that ideal filament for his electric light bulb. Time and time again the substance he used failed to last long enough or give enough light. One of his assistants asked him late one night if he ever got despondent about never getting anywhere. "Not getting anywhere!" replied Dr. Edison, "Why, on the contrary, I've discovered over 1500 ways that won't work!" Optimistic thinking, working through the problems of this present time, for "in this hope we are saved..." The Christian stance in the world is a stance of hope, confidence and assurance that God is in control. "God is working his reconciliation in the world," writes Harvey Cox, "and it is the world's renewal in which the Church is privileged to participate."

We can see God working his reconciliation in the tragedy of Watergate, for out of it all has come a new concern in the populace for a candidate's honesty and ethical record. We can see God working his reconciliation in the various shortages which are confronting us, for a new concern is emerging, a concern for the quality of life, not the quantity of life, and a new recognition that we must be stewards of the resources entrusted to us, not exploiters of them. We can see God working in the beauty of a sunset over the Pacific or in an Iowa cornfield on a hot July night when you can actually hear the corn growing. God hasn't returned, as the bumper sticker suggests; God's been here all along. With God's help we can become more able to see the bright side of the sufferings of this present age and so be more enabled to approach them confidently and positively.

Our family has a traditional oyster stew dinner every Christmas Eve. Even though we have them only this one time each year, I came to despise them. They are slimy hunks of flesh, whole creatures, and we had to eat them! I finally retreated from the reality of the meal by learning somehow to swallow them whole so that I wouldn't have to chew them up. Well, one Christmas Eve, my father who loves oysters, of course, and even chews them, chomped down on one and gave a start. He stuck his finger into his mouth and pulled out a tiny, perfect little pearl. Out of those slippery, shapeless oysters had come forth a pearl of considerable beauty! And, you know, ever since that time I have tried to chew my oysters. At first I was just looking for the pearl, which I haven't found, but gradually while looking for that elusive pearl, I have come to appreciate (to a certain extent) their delicate flavor. I'm still no lover of oysters, but I eat them, chew them, enjoy them and I'm optimistic every time I begin a bowl of them.

When we're confident of God's power and presence, we can be optimistic in this present time. We can always be looking for the pearls that we know are there, thanks to God's efforts. And furthermore, we can participate in the joys of the world, because we are freed from the worry about the ultimate direction in which the world is moving. It is moving, however deviously and hesitantly, in the directions God wants it to move. We have this assurance in the Bible, in Jesus' life and teaching; we have it in Paul's letters; and we can see evidence of it every day if we only look for it and seek to be in tune with God's efforts.

This optimism of which I speak doesn't mean that we are immune to pain and "the sufferings of this present age." Rather, our hope is in something which is beyond this age.

A very close friend of mine was told that he had atrophy of the brain, an extremely rare and so far incurable disease. His brain was actually shrinking up and it was explained to him that as his brain shriveled he would eventually become a vegetable or his heart would give out from the incredible pain. Jerry was a young man and he took the news very hard. In fact, he seriously considered taking his own life. Then he had a long talk with his minister and came to understand the power and presence of God in his life and a strange thing began to happen--Jerry began to go out into the community to visit the shut-ins and elderly and the ill. He cheered them up, buoyed their spirits for he felt that he could identify with them and their often hopeless state. By word and deed Jerry demonstrated that there was still plenty to live for even when the outlook was grim. Jerry lasted five years and then mercifully his heart gave out. The life he lived those five years, however, continues. The impact he made on those about him is as great as ever, for now many of those whom he helped are helping others. Jerry's confidence wasn't that he would recover, but rather that others might be renewed. His faith in God sustained him, and his life took on a meaningfulness that few of us ever realize. One of his favorite passages of Scripture was the one I read earlier: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Shall we pray. Our Father, work with us and through us, we pray. Infuse us with your power. Enlighten us with your wisdom. And give to us the optimism of Jesus Christ, now and forevermore. Amen.

ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

In order to simplify the process and still retain relevance to the purpose of this section, the critique of this sermon will be concerned with content rather than structure.

The purpose of the sermon is to reassure us that even in trying times there is reason for optimism because God is working effectively and affectively to make the world a better place. Further, the sermon argued that this faith in the future can give us patience in the present, for God is presently making divine purposes known and possible. The sermon calls for a faith in God which issues in optimism. This optimism is really just a different way of interpreting the events around us, but it is a way which stands consistent with Biblical theology. Finally, the sermon points out that from this optimistic faith in God comes creative and useful action in the world.

The Whiteheadian influence on the sermon can be seen in many places. The second scripture (Ro. 8:18-25), the optimistic brother, Edison's remark, the interpretation of the problems of 1974 and the closing illustration all reflect the confidence on the part of the preacher that, as was stated in the sermon, God is in the present with us, working to make all things better. There is no doubt that suggestion five is amply represented.

Suggestion four, that we can have a positive view of the future because of our faith in God's power, presence and wisdom, is illustrated by the oyster-eating incident, again by Romans 8:18-25, by Niebuhr's remark, and by the statements of faith in the future because of our

belief in God. In addition to these points it is argued that our hope in the present must come from our faith in the future.

Suggestion six, which speaks of the positive effects of our efforts even in the face of adversities and mistakes, is implied more than it is illustrated. The story of Jerry and the remarks of Thomas Edison both describe the effectiveness which results from confident, positive action in the world, but in neither case are the points clearly made that our efforts always have an effect or that no matter how imperfect, our actions can be used constructively by God.

In persuading the listener to see God's action, have faith in the future and consequently have hope in the present, the sermon is to a considerable extent effective. Its strengths lie in its consciously Christian interpretation and reinterpretation of present events, the use of appropriate images and the honest recognition of the travails of this present age.

It is in relation to suggestions one, two and three that the sermon falls sadly short. To a certain extent, there is a creative redefinition of the words "faith", "future" and "hope" in terms of the guidelines laid down in suggestion one. The redefinitions are effective as far as they go; however, suggestions two and three, i.e., the effective use of "grace" and "forgiveness" are totally lacking.

"Grace" and "forgiveness" could have been used very effectively to communicate the facts that in the present our pasts are "forgiven" by the offering of God's unique "future" for each of us.

Although not as easily integrated as the terms "grace" and

"forgiveness", the concept of "repentance" could have been used to highlight the necessity of change now. With proper scriptural support and a shift in structure the sermon could have ended on more than an emotional and optimistic upswing. It could have closed with the intelligible use of the Christian call to repent with illustrative examples of God's presence in us, helping us to change our lives in a repentant way.

The call for change in the sermon took the form of illustrating and demanding optimism based on present examples and past scripture. At this level, the sermon is respectable. However, with a little more effort, the groundwork could have been laid on which to base a call for repentance at a more profound level, the level of radical personal change.

This radical personal change, as we have discovered, is what Jesus demands. It represents the faith of our past and the only viable hope of the present. The preacher must possess a vision of reality which enables him or her to challenge the hearers with Jesus' radical message and at the same time reflect an adequate knowledge of the facts of this age.

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explain how such a vision can be found in a world of conflict and doubt, a world of science and technology and a world of individuals and systems. The preacher must bring to his or her task the belief in God's power and wisdom, the frank recognition of our weaknesses and mistakes and the faith that through the life and message of Jesus it is possible for the two to coalesce now and for evermore.

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